

Katie Greisiger has been selected as the 2015 Phoenix North First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.

Greisiger Champions engage in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Trained in Early Childhood, Every Day and the Write Way.
- Hosts FTF tables at various events.
- Organized and early childhood awareness building activity – Raising of America screening at Filmbar.



We recently caught up with Greisiger, who works as both a Research Assistant and Community Outreach Specialist at Southwest Human Development, Arizona's largest nonprofit dedicated to early childhood development for children ages birth to five. In addition to her full time work at Southwest Human Development she works part time as a Project Manager for Indigo Cultural Center, a nonprofit that provides research, advocacy and programming in early childhood, performing arts, education and social justice.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: We all know that the quality of the earliest years of a child's life can have an impact on many outcomes including health, academic, social and spiritual. Early interventions, consistent and caring relationships, and other community support systems in a child's early years can help to support those positive outcomes. A focus on early childhood development and health are therefore important to scaffold a child in to healthy adulthood and to in turn strengthen our communities.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness of early childhood issues?

A: My commitment to learning about and raising awareness in early childhood issues began when I started working at Southwest Human Development in 2013. Our agency is inspirational in that it supports many children and families in a wide range of services. I have a unique position at Southwest Human Development because I work on a program evaluation team and in community development, which allows me to interface with many different types of people. This work and experience has given me a versatile education in early childhood and our different systems. Early childhood is an integral part of any complex health, social or justice issue and something that I'll most likely always consider in my work and personal life moving forward.

I'm interested in working in public policy, advocacy, research and systems building, and I clearly see the importance of supporting all children and families for the betterment of our communities. In addition to my analytical interests, I've always been very empathetic toward others, caring deeply about social justice and equity. I believe that we cannot fully discuss and enforce public policy changes without including social justice topics such as race and equity.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: I believe that we can measure the health and social well-being of our communities by looking at each individual and/or family unit's well-being. If we're considering that measurement as a key indicator than there is no doubt that early childhood development and health is essential for our families and our communities.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: On a large scale, I believe that awareness in early childhood has been further supported by the creation of First Things First and similar state-wide systems, and the Obama administration's strong public acknowledgment, program implementation and fiscal supports. As the early childhood system continues to foster here in Arizona, I believe the awareness will only continue to deepen – in turn we can increase the understanding and empathy of our voters and business partners that can partner with service providers to better support positive life outcomes for our young children.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: I believe that everyone in our community can play an important role to support one another and to support early childhood issues. I think it's first important for us to recognize our strengths, our allotment of time available and our interests. Support could then be given through monetary donations to social service agencies, volunteering one's time to support direct programming and/or awareness of early childhood, advocating for issues that support children and families, and the sharing of ideas and collaboration with others that share a common goal. Beyond the obvious time or monetary commitments listed above, a person could simply make a difference by sharing the importance of early childhood in their social and professional circles and by publicly supporting First things First, of course!

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About First Things First – First Things First is a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten. Decisions about how those funds are spent are made by local councils staffed by community volunteers. To learn more, visit azftf.gov.